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Mr Iain Williamson
Headteacher
Dame Dorothy Primary School
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Dear Mr Williamson

Short inspection of Dame Dorothy Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 2 February 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in May 2012.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You lead by example and always put the pupils' needs, both academically and pastorally, first.

Parents are effusive in their praise of the school. One parent voiced the opinion expressed by many when writing, 'They go the extra mile in everything they do, everything is about the children.' Leaders' efforts to improve communication with parents are much appreciated. For example, parents value the regular updates they receive through social media about life in school.

Pupils told me that they feel 'empowered' in school. The older pupils take their 'young leader' role seriously and are a key part of the team that makes lunchtimes enjoyable and fun. Members of the school council appreciate their place in the school's decision-making processes. Their opinions matter and they feel valued. Pupils also like the regular opportunities they have to assess their own and other pupils' work. They undertake this task diligently and act in accordance with the detailed checklists provided by teachers.

You are innovative in your approach to school improvement and are part of a 'triad' of headteachers who focus on the core elements of challenge, support and accountability when carrying out improvement visits to each other's schools. Leaders benefit hugely from this school-to-school support. For example, the subject

leader for English has improved provision in school, having acted upon some of the practice she saw while taking part in an internship at one of the 'triad' schools.

Since the last inspection, you have successfully reduced the number of pupils who are absent and persistently absent from school. Tightening the school's systems and procedures to monitor pupils' attendance has led to some improvement. The main reason for improved attendance is that pupils really enjoy school and want to attend. They are engaged in their lessons and learning because the curriculum you offer is interesting and stimulating.

Over time, despite an improvement in the teaching of phonics, pupils have not made as much progress in reading as in writing and mathematics. Leaders, including governors, were especially disappointed with the progress made by key stage 2 pupils in reading last year. You have, quite correctly, made reading a key priority in the current plan for school improvement.

You have established a robust system to track the standards reached and the progress made by pupils. However, leaders do not use this data robustly to assess the impact of new initiatives. Although very knowledgeable about pupils' achievement at the end of the early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2, governors do not know enough about the attainment and progress of groups of pupils in Nursery and Years 1, 3, 4 and 5. Their ability to challenge you and subject leaders robustly is limited due to this lack of information.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Recruitment procedures are robust and the record of recruitment checks is compliant with requirements. Staff and governors have a thorough knowledge of the most recent guidance on keeping children safe in education. Pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe online is exemplary. The school's website provides a wealth of information, and hyperlinks to specific information for parents about how to keep their children safe as they use modern technology.

You work with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that children access the necessary support. As designated person for child protection, you are resolute in your dealings with the local authority's children's services. You ensure that all safeguarding referrals are followed up robustly.

You and your staff fulfil your duty of care to the pupils well. Pupils appreciate your efforts. During the inspection, an older pupil described the care as being 'like magic' in this school.

Inspection findings

- Leaders, in response to disappointing results in reading in 2016, have implemented a host of initiatives to improve pupils' reading skills further. These include the purchase of a new reading scheme for pupils in key stage 2, regular

opportunities for pairs of pupils to read to each other and an increased emphasis on teaching the more sophisticated skills of inference and deduction.

- Leaders had not measured the initial impact of these initiatives at the time of the inspection. However, the school's most recent assessment data indicates that pupils are beginning to make more rapid progress in reading. You appreciate there is a legacy of underachievement to be addressed and that some of the older pupils require targeted support if they are to meet the required standard in the summer.
- You identified some inconsistency in the quality of the questions asked by the teaching staff during the lessons that we observed together. In some classes, pupils give an answer to a question and give the reason behind their answer. In other classes, teachers accept a one-word answer from pupils. You quite correctly said that some teachers miss valuable opportunities to expand pupils' learning because of ineffective questioning. You also identified that this shortcoming could be rectified by a simple 'tell me why'.
- Governors have a strong understanding of the school's end of key stage assessment data. They have much less knowledge about pupils' attainment and progress in other year groups as a whole and for groups, such as girls and boys, within the year groups. They are unable to fulfil their support and challenge role fully without this information.
- Governors know about the impact of the support provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. They identified weaknesses in the school's data and published data for this group of pupils and challenged leaders accordingly. They now know that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from their individual starting points.
- Leaders have taken assertive action to improve pupils' attendance. They understand that attendance is improving and is now above the national average. They have investigated fully why girls do not attend school as regularly as boys and have compelling evidence that this anomaly is due to the exceptional circumstances of a small number of pupils.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers' work to improve standards in reading is embedded and, as a result, pupils reach the expected standard for their age and the most able pupils reach the higher standard of which they are capable
- all teachers and teaching assistants have very high expectations of the pupils and insist upon receiving full and reasoned answers to the questions they pose
- the attainment and progress of all pupils and all groups of pupils, in every year group, is analysed, challenged robustly and reported to governors on a regular basis.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools' commissioner and the director of children's services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Belita Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I discussed the work of the school with you, other members of the senior leadership team, subject leaders and five governors, including the chair of the governing body. I checked a range of documentation including leaders' evaluation of the school's effectiveness. I examined information about pupils' achievement together with external evaluations of aspects of the school's work and minutes of meetings of the governing body. I considered 75 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. I visited classes to observe teaching, learning and assessment, alongside you. I checked the progress made by pupils in their workbooks, talked formally to a group of six pupils and talked more informally to pupils in lessons and at breaktime about their learning. I also listened to pupils from Years 1, 3 and 6 read.